

Early History of the Kickapoo

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In 1828, a Kickapoo tribe of about 650 people moved from Mackinaw, Illinois, to a location on Indian Creek about seven miles south of present-day Fairbury. The Kickapoo stayed at this location for two years. In 1830, this Kickapoo tribe moved again to Oliver's Grove, about three miles south of present-day Chatsworth.

Valentine and Rachael Darnall were the first white settlers in Livingston County in 1830, settling south of Fairbury. About the same time the Darnalls built their first log cabin, the Kickapoo tribe was moving to Oliver's Grove.

The Kickapoo tribe lived south of Chatsworth until the 1832 Black Hawk War. After the war ended, this tribe was forced to leave Illinois and move to Missouri.

The 1878 Livingston County history book has a detailed description of the Kickapoo tribe from 1828 to 1832 and some limited information about the Kickapoo prior to 1828. Unfortunately, this history book does not document the Kickapoo's history for the prior centuries.

The Kickapoo had no written language, so no written records compiled by the tribe exist today. Therefore, we must rely on written documents from the French and British who occupied Illinois before it became a state in 1818.

In 2011, Mark J. Wagner wrote a book titled *The Rhoads Site: A Historic Kickapoo Village on the Illinois Prairie*. Mr. Wagner's primary focus was to learn more information about a Kickapoo village just east of Lincoln, Illinois, on the Henry Rhoads farm. Mr. Wagner also researched and documented the history of the Kickapoo tribe, going back to the early 1600s and up to 1832, when they were forced to leave Illinois.

In his book, Mr. Wagner noted that in the 1600s, the Kickapoo lived in southeast Michigan. The tribe then moved to northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. In 1673, French explorers Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet were the first Europeans to visit Illinois. They claimed the territory for France and named it Pays des Illinois, or Land of the Illinois.

Marquette and Jolliet started their trip at St. Ignace, located between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. They traveled by boat westwards across the north shore of Lake Michigan and then entered Wisconsin into Green Bay. They proceeded west to the Mississippi River. They went down the Mississippi through St. Louis and down to Arkansas. On their return trip, Native Americans suggested they take the Illinois River to Chicago and Lake Michigan.

When the expedition was in southern Wisconsin, one of the native American tribes they encountered was the Kickapoo. This encounter indicated the Kickapoo had moved from southeast Michigan to southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois by 1673.

1680 French Jesuit René-Robert Cavelier de la Salle built a mission near present-day Peoria. About 20 years later, in 1699, a small group of French settlers from Canada created Cahokia, Illinois, the first permanent settlement on the Mississippi River.

In 1717, the Illinois Country was annexed to the French province of Louisiana and became known as "Upper Louisiana." In 1718, Fort de Chartres in southern Illinois was established as the center of French governance of Illinois.

Another Native American tribe located in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois was the Fox. History books for that era refer to this tribe as the Fox. Modern-day descendants of this tribe prefer the name Mesquakie. In 1993, authors R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser published a book titled ***The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France.*** In their book, the authors note that the Fox tribe had disputes in northern Illinois with many other Native American tribes and the French military. In 1730, the Fox decided to move away from their enemies and relocated to a site near present-day Arrowsmith, Illinois. The Fox built a fort at their new home near Arrowsmith.

Word of the new home of the Fox at Arrowsmith quickly spread to all the enemies of the Fox tribe, including many Native American tribes and the French military. These enemies of the Fox, including the Kickapoo, quickly surrounded the Fox fort, and a siege began. After a few days of siege, the Fox decided to sneak away from their fort during a massive thunderstorm. The French military instructed their Native American allies to wait until the next day to attack the Fox tribe because of too much confusion during the terrific thunderstorm. When the storm cleared the next day, the Fox had only been able to travel a few miles from their fort during the storm. The combined forces of the French military and their Native American allies killed almost all of the 500 men, women, and children in the Fox tribe. The Kickapoo participated in what is now known as the 1830 Fox Massacre at Arrowsmith.

In 1763, the French signed a treaty in Paris that designated the Mississippi River as a dividing stream, not a uniting one. After the French and Indian War, the Illinois Country east of the Mississippi River was ceded to the British, and the land west of the river was ceded to Spanish Louisiana.

The French occupied and claimed Illinois as French territory for 90 years, from 1673 until the treaty in 1763. Illinois then became a British possession after this treaty was signed.

According to legend, in 1769, the Starved Rock Massacre took place near LaSalle, Illinois. The legend claims that after a member of the Illiniwek Confederation killed Chief Pontiac, several tribes, including the Chippewa, Potawatomi, Ottawa, and

Kickapoo, united to seek vengeance against the Illiniwek. These Native American tribes starved the Illiniwek tribe to death.

However, it's crucial to understand that the Starved Rock massacre is more of a legend than a verified historical event. Recent research has cast significant doubt on whether this massacre actually occurred or not. Very few facts have been found which substantiate this legend.

The 1878 Livingston County history book describes a massive battle between Native American tribes in 1774. This battle was the result of a land dispute with the Miami tribe on one side of the conflict and the Kickapoos and Pottawatomies on the other side. The two sides agreed to select three hundred warriors and fight each other to determine the winner. At sunrise, the battle occurred on Sugar Creek's banks (now Bloomington-Normal). By the time the sun set that day, only 12 men remained who were not killed or mortally wounded. There were five Miamis still alive and seven Kickapoos and Pottawatomies.

In this battle, the Kickapoos and Pottawatomies were declared the victors. The Miami tribe retired to the east side of the Wabash River. The Kickapoo and Pottawatomie divided up the land west of the Wabash River. These two tribes agreed that an Indian trail passing near Oliver's Grove (three miles south of Chatsworth) would be the dividing line for the Illinois land. East and southwest of this line belonged to the Kickapoos and the remainder to the Pottawatomies.

The Treaty of Paris in 1783 ceded the Illinois Country to the United States. After the American Revolution ended in 1783, Illinois was technically part of the state of Virginia.

One of the few written accounts of how the Kickapoo lived in the 1780s is from William Biggs's in 1788. He was captured and held by the Kickapoo tribe for a while until they ransomed him and released him. They traveled about 30 miles daily on horseback near the Wabash River southeast of Champaign, Illinois. Mr. Biggs wrote a book describing the Kickapoo lifestyle in that era.

When the first surveyor passed through the land near present-day Leroy, Illinois, he noted that between 2,000 and 3,000 Kickapoo lived in their village in 1824. This site is now known as the Grand Village of the Kickapoo.

In 1828, about 650 members of this tribe moved to a location on Indian Creek about seven miles south of present-day Fairbury. The Kickapoo stayed at this location for two years. In 1830, this Kickapoo tribe moved again to Oliver's Grove, about three miles south of present-day Chatsworth. In 1832, this tribe was forced to move to Missouri. Eventually, portions of the Kickapoo tribe migrated to Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico. In 2024, a total of about 5,000 Kickapoo live in these three states and Mexico.

The Kickapoo people's migratory path started in southeast Michigan in 1600. By 1673, they had moved to southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. By 1774, they were living

west of the Wabash River in central Illinois. One branch of the tribe lived south of Fairbury and then Chatsworth in the 1828-1832 era. In 1832, the Kickapoo were forced to leave Illinois and move to Missouri. Today, there are about 5,000 descendants of this tribe living in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico.



About 650 members of the Kickapoo tribe lived south of Fairbury from 1828 to 1830 and then south of Chatsworth from 1830 to 1832. In 1832 the tribe was forced to leave Illinois and they moved to Missouri. This image of typical Kickapoo life in that era is from a diorama at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield, Illinois.